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Ministry of Forests
Chief Forester's Office

PRINCE GEORGE ANNUAL CUT INCREASED TO BATTLE BEETLE

VICTORIA – The allowable annual cut for the Prince George timber supply area will be increased to battle the continuing mountain pine beetle epidemic, British Columbia chief forester Larry Pedersen announced today.

Effective Saturday, the new allowable annual cut will be 12.244 million cubic metres, an increase of about 2.9 million cubic metres per year from the last allowable annual cut set in 1996. "This increase is vital to help slow the spread of the beetle and to salvage the large and growing areas of infested timber," Pedersen said. "The epidemic is expanding at a vigorous rate, and the current level of harvesting just hasn't kept pace."

Recent aerial and ground surveys indicate the beetle epidemic has more than doubled in the last year and has attacked an estimated 428,000 hectares in the Prince George timber supply area.

"The beetles are killing vast areas of lodgepole pine forests and will inevitably affect many forest values," Pedersen said. "But I expect that with an increase in the allowable annual cut, the health and productivity of the forests will return sooner than if we made no effort to contain the beetles or salvage the infested timber."

Current estimates indicate that for every infested tree removed at the front of the epidemic, up to 16 trees will be saved from attack the following year. However, not all trees are economical to harvest, so a variety of techniques are used to help reduce the rate of spread of beetles. These include removing single brood trees, and baiting trees with pheromone so that beetles can be contained and destroyed.

The determination takes into consideration environmental factors like biodiversity, wildlife habitat, scenic areas and lakes, streams and wetlands. The goals of the Vanderhoof, Prince George and Fort St. James land and resource management plans were also considered.

"This is not a long-term solution: it's a temporary, extraordinary measure to deal with a catastrophic mountain pine beetle infestation," Pedersen said. "Forest Service staff will monitor the infestation, and if required, I will re-examine the determination before the usual five-year term."

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The Prince George timber supply area covers about 7.5 million hectares in the central Interior, and includes the Vanderhoof, Fort St. James and Prince George forest districts.

The chief forester's determination is an independent professional judgment based on information ranging from technical forestry reports and public input to the government's social and economic goals.

Prince George is the 28th of 37 allowable annual cut determinations for timber supply areas in the second provincewide timber supply review. The review provides an up-to-date assessment of timber supply in each of B.C.'s 37 timber supply areas and 34 tree farm licences based on the best available information and current management practices.

A copy of the chief forester's allowable annual cut determination for the Prince George timber supply area and the summary of public input on the Prince George timber supply review are available at the Ministry of Forests Web site at www.for.gov.bc.ca/tsb/tsr2/tsa/tsa29/tsa29.htm and at the following Forest Service offices:

Fort St. James forest district, 250-996-5200
Prince George forest district, 250-565-7100
Vanderhoof forest district, 250-567-6363

For more information on the timber supply review, visit http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/tsb on the Internet.

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Backgrounder: MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE FAQs

Q: Why is the allowable annual cut increasing in the Prince George timber supply area?
A: The increase is a result of a mountain pine beetle epidemic. Harvesting stands while the beetles are still present will slow the rate of spread and save healthy trees. Current estimates of the beetle's rate of spread indicate that every infested tree removed at the front of the infestation will save up to 16 trees from being attacked the following year.

In the Vanderhoof forest district, the infestation is no longer manageable within existing harvest levels. All of the district's historic AAC (two million cubic metres) is targeted at beetle-infested stands. If harvesting were not increased, up to 100 million cubic metres of timber could be at risk.

Of course, not all trees are economical to harvest. That's why a variety of techniques are used to help reduce the rate of spread of beetles, including removing single brood trees and baiting trees with pheromone so that beetles can be contained and destroyed

Q: How are environmental values protected?
A: Management strategies must be designed and applied in a way that protects the ecological integrity of the area. This is done by preserving:

- Adequate buffer zones around lakes, streams and wetlands.
- Old-growth management areas.
- Wildlife trees (snags) to provide small animal and bird habitat.

- Wildlife corridors.

As well, current forest management follows the standards set out by the Forest Practices Code. These standards incorporate a range of biodiversity and wildlife values.

In addition, the Prince George, Vanderhoof and Fort St. James land and resource management plans provide direction on a range of environmental considerations.

The beetle epidemic will inevitably alter many environmental values and habitats. A variety of silvicultural systems and treatments will be used in harvesting affected areas to maintain a diversity of habitats.

Q: Won't increasing the allowable annual cut just make things worse? Why not do nothing and let nature takes its course?
A: Doing nothing could have a disastrous impact on the forest industry, which accounts for more than half of all employment in the Fort St. James forest district, 41 per cent of employment in the Vanderhoof district and 30 per cent of employment in the Prince George district.

Under epidemic conditions enough beetles can emerge from an infested tree to kill up to 16 more trees of the same size the following year. Harvesting stands while the beetles are still present will help reduce the rate of spread and save healthy trees.

Left unchecked, the beetle infestation will place the future timber supply of the Prince George timber supply area in jeopardy, since more than half of the trees available for harvesting are lodgepole pine.

By harvesting and promptly reforesting beetle-infested areas, the ministry is planning for the future by ensuring a healthy long-term timber supply. If the current beetle infestation is left unchecked, the future harvest level in the Prince George timber supply area could be reduced by as much as 200,000 cubic metres per year.

Unless harvested in time, the infested wood will deteriorate and become unusable for lumber manufacturing.

There is a danger that if not logged in time, the infested wood will become susceptible to fire, which in turn will not only endanger nearby stands of marketable timber, but also recreation, range and residential areas.

The impact of the beetle is not limited to timber loss. There are also effects on a variety of other resource values, including:

- Recreation and backcountry recreation
- Biodiversity
- Landscape and esthetics
- Cultural heritage
- Fish and wildlife
- Watershed management

Q: What about the argument that clear cutting large swaths of the central Interior isn't the way to fight the mountain pine beetle?
A: We agree. That's why we are using a variety of approaches to combat the mountain pine beetle, such as:

- Pheromone baiting - luring beetles into baited trees, where the population can be contained and destroyed.
- Brood tree removal (sanitation harvesting) - removing single infested trees to control the spread of beetle populations to other areas.
- Fall and burn - falling and burning beetle-infested trees to prevent the spread of beetle populations to other areas. This technique is usually done in the winter to reduce the risk of starting forest fires.
- Snip and skid - removing groups of infested trees scattered over a large area.
- Helicopter logging - removing infested trees in areas where conventional access is not available.
- Small patch cuts and selection harvesting to remove infestation centres.
- A variety of silvicultural systems in various habitat conditions.

Nevertheless, clearcutting is appropriate to reduce large beetle populations in severely infested areas, and to minimize further attack.

Q: Why not take a more holistic approach by working with communities and harvesting on a small scale?
A: We are working closely with the communities affected by the epidemic. Consultation is also underway with stakeholders on the best approaches to harvesting.

But we are in an epidemic situation. Even with an increased harvest level, we won't be able to harvest all of the beetle-killed trees. We project that if the epidemic continues at the beetle's current rate of spread, and if it isn't slowed by control measures or a severe winter, as much as 100 million cubic metres of timber could be affected.

Ministry of Forests Links:
http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/PAB/News/Features/beetles/index.htm Bark Beetles in BC
http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/forsite/Forest_Health.htm Forest Health
http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/PAB/News/Features/beetles/bbphotos.htm Photos

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Visit the province's Web site at http://www.gov.bc.ca/ for online information and services.